

“BOB DYLAN’S PALS AND ME “

By

Robert Leaman Sanders

So, my friend says: “Robert, I’ll show you some cool moves on guitar. Only a rare few in the whole world know ‘em. I got Bobby to teach me. I told Bob, hey, look, I gave you my bedroom to live in. The least you could do is show me some moves. Bob caved in and gave me guitar lessons.”

That’s what my friend, Peter, told me back in New York. Well, dear reader, I picked my friend Peter’s brain. I mastered those very same cool sounding variations of guitar chords he got from Dylan and I went out and started singing and playing my own original songs way back when. I played what I call The Greenwich Village Circuit -The Gaslight Lounge, Kettle-of-Fish, Paul Colby’s Bitter End, Gurdie’s Folk City, the whole bit. But, this reminiscence is not really about me. It is more about how I crossed paths with the incomparable Bob Dylan even if only a trifle.

One night, when my band and I had just finished playing a set at a private party in Harlem, New York, this kid, by the name of Peter, comes up to me and he says: “I want to manage you.” I said to him: “Good. You can manage me. You can get me a recording contract like as soon as possible.” The kid says: “Okay.” I said: “Do you know anything about the music business?” Peter says: “Meet me at my mom’s house tomorrow. She’ll tell you.”

So I go. I meet his mom. Her name was Eve McKenzie. Eve was a Broadway stage show costume designer. At the time, she was working with the great Jerome Robbins – Broadway’s WEST SIDE STORY. When I got there, Eve and her super nice guy husband, Mac, gave me a quick tour of their modest apartment, then they sat me down at the kitchen table. Mac poured me a whiskey – in quite a dignified way. I began sipping. Eve says to me: “My son, Peter, thinks you have a marvelous singing voice. “I said: “Thank you. “She says: "Okay. We, in this family, know a little something about show business and musicians because, well...”and then Mrs. McKenzie began to tell me things that were certainly interesting and truly amusing. She told me of how her son, Peter, volunteered to give up the bedroom he had grew up in in that apartment to Bob Dylan when Bob first arrived in New York

and started playing the coffee houses near Washington Square Park of The Village.

Eve opened her little story by telling me of a phone call she had gotten from Mrs. Margie Guthrie, wife of the famous folk singer, Woody Guthrie – THIS LAND IS YOUR LAND. Eve and Marge Guthrie had been lifelong friends. The Guthrie's boy, Arlo, was scheduled to debut at The Gaslight Lounge and Marge telephoned to invite Eve to sit with Marge to listen and to lend support to Arlo. I sat back and I watched Eve as she explained things. I was enjoying myself to no end. Not necessarily from the scotch as much as witnessing the "performance" of Eve. Eve was a very energetic, very Jewish person with all the wonderful antics and expressions of... of, I don't know, ...put her in the category that would include... oh, let's see... I've got it, picture in your mind the American comedian, Jackie Mason. Now, try to imagine what Jackie Mason's mother could have been like. Now you've got what is probably a pretty close image of our Eve. On the surface, Eve was telling me a story about Bob Dylan staying at her house. However, trust me, when Eve told the story, it wasn't only about Bob Dylan.

Eve had a way of packing absolute loads of social commentary of her own in between the lines. For Eve, in her own right, had a lot to say about life's injustices and how hard things could be. She was very truthful and very accurate about things. I had come to admire Eve very much.

So, Eve, in the kitchen that afternoon, goes on to explain to me that she did indeed go with Marge to The Gaslight Lounge to see Arlo's debut, and that she and Marge Guthrie sat at a tiny cocktail table while they were waiting for Arlo to appear on stage. Eve said Marge did most of the talking and that Marge brought up the subject of tremendous buzz that was circulating the streets among New York's intelligentsia. Marge could have said to Eve: "Well, yeah, there is a new young folk singer who just arrived on the scene and everyone's talking about how his new original songs take remarkably accurate jabs at society's hypocrisies. Nobody's ever heard anything quite like what this new fellow is doing." And then Marge drops the bomb on Eve. Marge tells Eve that the singer / poet needed a place to stay, needed a roof over his head because he was just starting out and he was, unsurprisingly, broke. Marge said that she also liked the young fellow because he compassionately took time out to visit with her husband, Woody Guthrie, who was seriously ailing in a hospital. All the while I'm sipping have a merry ol' time. Eve emphatically continues. She says: "Robert, Marge and I never had to mince words. I said to Marge - "So what you are saying to me, Marge, is that you want me to give

up my son Peter's bedroom, while he is studying up at Harvard, to some stranger. Marge replied: "Right. He's sitting over there in the corner." Eve said: "At that point I called Bob over to our table and I looked him up and then down. He had a black raincoat on and he looked like an interesting colorful character from a Charles Dickens novel."

The upshot is that Bob did move into Mrs. McKenzie's apartment at 10 West 28th Street and he operated for a while out of my friend Peter's bedroom. Mr. Bob Dylan continued performing in Greenwich Village to the point where his beautiful mug got to be featured on the front page of The New York Times, where he signed his first recording contract with Columbia Records, and where he established himself to become the greatest contemporary crowned artist in residence to the entire modern world. Of course, Bob moved out of Eve and Mac's apartment as soon as he got his advance from Columbia Records. By the time I'd met Peter, Bob Dylan was world renown. One day I had decided to pay a visit to 10 West 28th Street just to say hello to everybody and to hang out. I enjoyed that family so much.

But, my visit that day didn't work out. When I got to the apartment, this was years later, Peter came to the door and whispered: "Bobby's here. You can come in if you want, but,..." And I said to Peter: "No. I know when I am odd man out. It wouldn't be right. He came to visit with you guys. I'll just see ya later." I still use those cool guitar moves Peter learned from Dylan long ago on a lovely cozy festive night at The McKenzie's apartment at 10 West 28th.

Today, somewhere on the web if one Googles "The Mckenzie Tapes", I believe it is possible for one to hear fascinating home recordings of Bob Dylan singing live at the apartment one Thanksgiving night. As I recall from what Peter once told me Bob's Sarah was there that night too. Incidentally, my current original song on YOUTUBE, search BE KIND ROBERT LEAMAN SANDERS, not only utilizes those Bob-to-Peter-to-Robert cool guitar chords, the overall "feel" and style of the song, "Be Kind" is reminiscent of early Bob's folk songs. Rock on, baby! Click this: "BE KIND"

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iFY1ZjWCVQM>

--- Robert Leaman Sanders